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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
RECOMMENDS RADON TESTING IN HOMES**

Radon is the number one cause of lung cancer among non-smokers

(RICHMOND, Va.)—With the cold weather upon us, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) urges homeowners to protect their families by testing for radon. Radon is a gas that comes from the natural breakdown of uranium in soil, rock and water. Even though there are no immediate symptoms, radon becomes harmful at elevated levels when trapped inside of buildings.

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), radon is the number one cause of lung cancer among non-smokers and is responsible for 21,000 lung cancer deaths every year. About 2,900 of these deaths occur among people who have never smoked. The amount of time between radon exposure and the onset of lung cancer may be many years.

When dispersed outdoors, radon poses very little harm. Radon typically enters homes through cracks and other holes in the foundation. Any house is susceptible to radon exposure, whether old or new, with or without a basement, well-sealed or drafty.

Conducting a radon test is the only way to determine whether your home is free of radon, because you can't see, smell or taste it. The best times to conduct a test are fall and winter, because doors and windows are usually sealed against the cold. This ensures a more accurate reading. However, testing can be conducted at any time of the year if doors and windows have been closed for 12 hours. The EPA recommends that testing be conducted in the lowest livable level of the home, such as the basement.

Radon is measured in picocuries (units of radiation) per liter of air. Houses with radon levels registering four picocuries or more should be vented to prevent the accumulation of the gas indoors. Homeowners can seal cracks and other openings in the foundation to reduce radon exposure. However, the EPA does not recommend the use of sealing alone to limit radon entry. In most cases, a ventilation system is required to prevent the gas from entering the home from below the floor and outside the foundation.

Low-cost radon test kits are available at most hardware stores. For more information on radon testing, call VDH's Radon Hotline (800) 468-0138 or visit www.vdh.virginia.gov/rad/RHP-radon.asp.

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